STATEWIDE REPORT

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If weather permits, the 2003 deer harvest is expected to be similar to last year's estimated harvest of 480,000 deer, or about the total size of Michigan's deer herd in 1970. Hunters will spend more than 10 million days enjoying deer hunting recreation during archery, firearm, and muzzleloading seasons combined, which is more deer hunting recreation than in any other state or Canadian province. Deer hunting in Michigan is big business. An expected 775,000 individuals will purchase at least one deer license in 2003 and spend more than \$500 million for food, lodging, transportation, and equipment to pursue deer in Michigan.

The goal of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is to maintain a quality deer herd that is in balance with its habitat and yields healthy fawns, does, and bucks. Biologists estimate Michigan's statewide fall whitetail population between 1.7 and 1.8 million, about the same as in recent years. The deer herd is not uniform across Michigan. In the last decade, the southern half of the Lower Peninsula (LP) has contributed an increasing percentage of the statewide deer population. Last year, for the first time ever, the estimated Southern Michigan deer harvest exceeded the combined estimated harvest for Northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula (UP).

Archery deer hunting season is open from October 1 through November 14 and December 1 through January 1. Firearm season is November 15 through 30, and muzzleloading season is December 5 through 14 in the UP and December 12 through 21 in the LP. Early (October 11 to October 19) antlerless firearm deer hunting is in the special regulations (bovine tuberculosis) counties. Youth firearm season is September 27 and 28, statewide. Disabled hunters' season is October 18 and 19, statewide. Late antlerless firearm season is December 22 through January 1, on private land in 20 Deer Management Units (DMUs) in the LP. Check the 2003 Hunting and Trapping Guide for details.



The DNR provides about 90 deer check stations around the state to help evaluate and monitor Michigan's deer herd. Hunters are encouraged to bring their deer or deer head to a DNR check station, to share valuable information with the Department and earn a 2003 Deer Management Cooperator patch. Visit the DNR web site (www.michigan.gov/dnr) for the office location and hours.

Stewardship

The whitetails' reproductive capability and their ability to adapt to the variety of habitats across the state have resulted in the present Michigan deer herd above the goal of 1.4–1.5 million. This is exciting to citizens who enjoy hunting or observing deer, but is problematic to the habitat and the overall ecosystem. In the absence of regulated hunting, deer in most parts of Michigan have a higher birth rate than death rate each year. Without controls, Michigan's deer population will continue to exceed the overall statewide goal. This impacts the quality and quantity of habitat, deer productivity, and deer/human conflicts. Harvesting deer through regulated recreational hunting is the only viable management tool to keep the deer herd in

balance with the available habitat. A harvest of both sexes is necessary to maintain a healthy and thriving deer population. Antlerless quotas are designed to address deer population numbers on a local basis. This year the statewide antlerless harvest should be very similar to the statewide buck harvest. In areas where the deer herd is above goal, liberal antlerless quotas will provide the opportunity to harvest more antlerless deer than antlered bucks.

Upper Peninsula (UP)

Deer in the southern 2/3 of the UP experienced a moderate to mild winter as indicated by the winter severity index. Winter losses were minimal, and fawn production was good across this area. The Lake Superior watershed deer population is expected to be similar to last year. The highest deer numbers will be seen in the south-central part of the UP (Menominee, Delta, Dickinson, Iron, and southern Marquette counties). The UP buck population is expected to be near normal, which will produce a good buck harvest. Some counties in the UP still have more deer than desired. Liberal private land antlerless deer licenses in the agricultural areas this year may help to reduce the deer population.

Northern Lower Peninsula (NLP)

The deer herd in the NLP is about the same or slightly lower than in 2002. Antler development will be good in 1½-year-olds, and deer weights should also be good this fall. The buck harvest is expected to be similar or slightly higher than in years past. The antlerless deer harvest is expected to be down. The herd in this part of the state has been intentionally reduced from a peak in the late 1980s. At that time, car-deer crashes and crop damage were at unacceptable, record levels. The herd still remains over goal in some locations. There are over 21,000 square miles of land open to take antlerless deer in 2003, the same as in 2002 and 2001. In addition, a large number of antlerless deer licenses will be available in the bovine tuberculosis (TB) positive counties. This continues the DNR's goal to eradicate bovine TB in the deer herd.

Southern Lower Peninsula (SLP)

The southern Michigan deer herd appears to be stabilizing in some areas. The antlered buck harvest is expected to be similar to 2002. However, current numbers remain at or above the desired levels in many areas; crop damage complaints and vehicle-deer accidents continue to be a challenge for managers. The Department is responding to concerns of too many deer in this part of the state with significant numbers of antlerless deer licenses for hunting on private lands. Deer hunters should continue to see many deer during the hunting season. The SLP should produce some of the best white-tailed deer hunting in the nation for both antlered and antlerless deer. Twelve counties in SLP are open to the late antlerless firearm season this year. Check the 2003 Hunting and Trapping Guide for the open counties.

WESTERN UPPER PENINSULA MANAGEMENT UNIT

(Baraga, Delta, Dickinson, Gogebic, Houghton, Iron, Keweenaw, Marquette, Menominee, Ontonagon and west ½ of Alger counties)

Contact: Robert Doepker, 906-228-6561

The Western Upper Peninsula (WUP) Management Unit will have higher deer numbers compared to last year, and we expect better buck hunting success. Antlerless licenses are reduced, compared to last year, primarily due a reduction in the number of antlerless licenses in the northern portions of the Unit. The severity of winter weather is a major factor determining the number and productivity of deer in the WUP. Southern portions of the WUP experienced milder than normal temperatures, and snowfall and over-winter survival of deer was excellent. Deer wintering in northern areas experienced more severe winter conditions, and some deer mortality occurred. Deer in the WUP are not uniformly distributed. Deer numbers are highest in the southern agricultural areas of Delta, Menominee, and Dickinson counties. Good deer numbers are also found in the primarily forested middle portion of the WUP. Deer numbers are lowest in the northern 1/3 of the WUP.

Gogebic, Ontonagon, Baraga, Keweenaw and Houghton counties - Rob Aho: 906-353-6651

Last winter's more severe weather in the northern portions of the WUP is reflected in over-winter mortality that was about 2.5 times higher than the winter before. Losses were concentrated in areas with deeper snow and/or colder temperatures. Fawn production was affected by winter stress on pregnant does, resulting in fewer observations of twin fawns. Deer densities are under goal in the northern portions of these five counties. Antler development should be average to slightly below average. A very limited number of public land antlerless licenses are available for DMU 066. Southeast Gogebic and southwest Iron counties have a more stable deer population, and the antlerless quotas for both public and private land in DMU 027 reflect this.

Iron and Dickinson counties - Douglas Wagner: 906-875-6622

A few more deer are being seen and some with decent antler development, but some areas are under goal. South Dickinson and Iron counties have fair to excellent deer numbers, and a fair number of antlerless licenses are available for DMU 022. Northwestern Iron and mid-Dickinson counties have moderate deer numbers, and northeastern Iron and northwestern Dickinson counties are still recovering from past severe winters. A limited number of private land antlerless licenses are available in DMU 036.

Delta and Menominee counties - Craig Albright: 906-786-2351

Deer appear to be plentiful on the agricultural landscape of southern Menominee and western Delta counties. The number of deer damage complaints is similar to last year. Heavily forested landscapes that lack agriculture traditionally hold less deer. A special early firearm season will be held in DMU 055 from September 20-26 on private land for antierless deer only. This will provide extra opportunity to address crop damage and tree regeneration problems. Private land antierless deer licenses are still available in many deer management units, and they can be purchased at a rate of one per day until the quota is reached. Hunters should be aware that special regulations are in place in DMUs 122, 152, 155, and 252. These units, which mainly lie within Dickinson, Delta, Marquette, and Alger counties, are "quality deer management" test areas that are intended to produce a different sex ratio and a deer population in balance with the habitat. Bucks must have three or more points on one side to be legal in these units.

Marquette and West Alger counties - Michael Koss: 906-346-9201

Deer along the Lake Superior watershed always seem to struggle with winter, and last winter's snow and cold temperatures, once again, produced tough conditions for deer in that area. In northern Marquette and Alger counties, deer numbers will be similar to last year at best, and will probably be down from last year in some areas. Proceeding south into the moderate snowfall zones, the winter severity was milder, and deer numbers have increased modestly over last year's levels. As of early fall, some acorns are showing up in southern Marquette County, but it is difficult to say how abundant mast will be.

EASTERN UPPER PENINSULA MANAGEMENT UNIT

(Chippewa, east ½ Alger, Luce, Mackinac and Schoolcraft counties)

Contact: Thomas Weise, 906-293-5131

Overall hunters can expect to see about the same number of deer this season as they did last year. Deer numbers are still good and will provide excellent hunting opportunities. The first half of last winter was mild, but the winter extended late into the spring. This may have reduced fawn survival which could affect the number of yearlings in the herd for the 2003 season. The summer was generally warm with adequate rainfall so the deer should be going into the winter in good condition.

Other factors, such as weather, will play a major role in determining the type of season we have this year. Weather influences deer movements, hunter activity, and access.

The DNR is not collecting heads for TB in the UP during the 2003 season. However, Alger, Chippewa, and Mackinac counties will have heads collected for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) testing. The DNR will be asking hunters in these three counties to help by donating their deer heads for testing.

Eastern Alger and Schoolcraft counties

Hunters will find more deer and deer hunters in the southern portion of the unit. The agricultural areas tend to support a higher deer population than forested areas; deer from farm country tend to be at a higher nutritional plane and therefore support larger antlers than animals of the same age in forested systems.

Deer numbers decrease from south to north with lowest densities in the Lake Superior snowbelt. The buck-to-doe ratio appears somewhat higher in the north. The northern areas have some of the lowest hunter densities providing a place to hunt for those who like to get away from hunting pressure.

Chippewa and East Mackinac counties

Deer numbers are above the desired population level for Chippewa and east Mackinac counties. Higher deer densities are found on private lands and particularly in the agricultural areas. Overall, deer densities are generally higher in the southern portions of the area and thin out as one travels north. Hunters can expect to see more deer than last year due in part to the low harvest in 2001 and to the mild conditions last winter. On Drummond Island, hunters can expect more deer than last year with an abundance of antlerless deer in the population. The "no spike" rule is still in effect for Drummond Island, so hunters should be aware of that rule.

NORTHEAST MANAGEMENT UNIT

(Alcona, Alpena, Antrim, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Crawford, Emmet, Iosco, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Oscoda, Otsego, Presque Isle and Roscommon counties)

Contact: Glen Matthews, 989-732-3541

The Northeast Management Unit will begin the fall season with a deer population that is similar to 2002. Low winter mortality and good fawn production has balanced the effect of recent liberal antlerless seasons. In some areas, the deer population remains above goal. A buck harvest about equal to last year is anticipated. Partly as a result of last year's excellent acorn crop, antler development in bucks could be above average. The number of antlerless licenses available is expected to achieve an antlerless deer harvest approximately equal to the buck harvest. In most of the DMUs, the private land antlerless license quota remains high while the public land antlerless licenses have been reduced.

The best success rates will be experienced in the mixed agricultural and forest land areas of Iosco, Ogemaw, and western Antrim and Charlevoix counties. Hunters in Alpena and Alcona counties will have good success rates, though somewhat lower than in past years. Public lands in Alcona, Crawford, Montmorency, and Roscommon counties will provide good opportunities to hunt deer.

Early season hunting around apple trees should be good. Wild apples have produced well this year, although fruits are small due to dry weather. Acorn production is spotty. Red oaks are producing mast in some locations. Deer will also be foraging on the ground in open areas, farm fields, and lowlands until snow cover.

As a part of Michigan's strategy to eliminate bovine TB in deer and elk, feeding and baiting is prohibited in a seven-county area which includes Alcona, Alpena, Crawford, Montmorency, Oscoda, Otsego, and Presque Isle counties.

There is a continuing need for deer samples for the bovine TB surveillance effort. Deer hunters are urged to locate a check station and submit their deer head for testing. During the firearms season, all stations that were open last year will be operating.

Very few elk are accidentally shot by deer hunters; however, those coming to the elk range in southern Cheboygan, northern Otsego, southwest Presque Isle, and Montmorency counties are reminded to be careful and avoid the unintentional shooting of an elk.

NORTHWEST MANAGEMENT UNIT

(Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Lake, Leelanau, Manistee, Mason, Mecosta, Missaukee, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola and Wexford counties)

Contact: Penney Melchoir, 231-775-9727

In the majority of this Management Unit, overall deer populations are expected to be slightly lower as a result of encouraging the harvest of antlerless deer in recent seasons to bring those populations closer to goal. However, the Management Unit experienced only limited winter mortality and had good fawn production and survival, especially in the central and southern counties, so there should still be plenty of good hunting opportunities. We anticipate the buck harvest to be down slightly in most of the northern and central counties and about the same or slightly higher in the southern three counties of the Unit.

The northern counties (Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, and Leelanau) have lower deer numbers compared to the last 5-6 years because of efforts to bring populations closer to goal levels. Antlerless licenses were reduced this year and are limited to private lands. Reduced antlerless licenses will result in fewer does and fawns in the harvest, but archery pressure on either sex remains about the same as last year on state lands close to the heavily populated Traverse City area. The buck harvest will be somewhat reduced from last year, but the yearling age class should be well represented with improved antler development this year. Acorn and beechnut production varies throughout the northern portion of the Unit, with the best hunting opportunities on or near private property with agricultural lands attracting the most deer.

For the central counties (Lake, Manistee, Mason, Missaukee, Osceola, and Wexford), hunters have successfully reduced the deer herd. They can expect to see slightly lower deer numbers from last year as a result of that increased harvest of antlerless deer in recent years. The exception for this portion of the Unit remains in Manistee County, which has more fertile soils, milder winters, more acres in agricultural use, and a larger deer herd. Once again this county will see an overall buck harvest as good as or better than last year, and the best hunting opportunities will be on private land. State and federal lands are extensive in this county and can also provide good hunting opportunity where natural foods are present. Antlerless licenses have been offered for both public and private lands in Manistee County. The remainder of the central portion of the Unit should expect to see slightly lower buck harvests compared to last year. Antler development appears normal for this year. Acorn and beechnut production is scattered this year, and most of the acorns to be found will be used up in the early part of archery season. The best hunting opportunities exist on privately-owned lands. Deer numbers on public land in Osceola, Lake, and Mason counties will be down slightly from last year.

In the southern counties (Mecosta, Newaygo, and Oceana), deer numbers remain about the same or slightly higher than last year. Agricultural damage complaints were up slightly from last year. We experienced good fawn production in this portion of the Unit, with many reports of twins and triplets. These areas should also have a large component of yearling bucks this year. The best hunting opportunities will once again be found on privately owned agricultural lands, so hunters are encouraged to contact landowners for permission to hunt these lands. Soft mast production is fair to poor this year. Gray dogwood has about a third of the fruit of a good year, with many empty stems without berries. Black cherry is very spotty, with many trees having no fruit, and autumn olive producing average food production this year. The late antlerless season in Mecosta County was eliminated this year, so hunters will want to harvest antlerless deer early in the firearm season.

SAGINAW BAY MANAGEMENT UNIT

(Arenac, Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Huron, Isabella, Midland, Saginaw, Sanilac and Tuscola counties)

Contact: Tim Reis, 989-684-9141

Whitetail deer numbers remain slightly above population goal in many portions of the Saginaw Bay Management Unit.

In the "Thumb" area, deer numbers are greater than last year. The availability of antlerless licenses on private lands has been increased in Tuscola and Sanilac counties but remains the same for Huron County. The deer harvest will likely be greater than last year. Deer hunters are encouraged to take antlerless deer in all Thumb counties to assist with achieving population goals.

In Bay County, deer numbers are down slightly compared to the 2002 season. However, hunters should find similar numbers of deer in Saginaw, Isabella, and Midland counties.

Deer population levels remain stable in Clare, Gladwin, and Arenac counties; hunters should observe deer numbers similar to the two previous deer seasons. Hunters can anticipate similar hunting results compared to the 2002 season.

The deer population on the Shiawassee Flats is above goal. Deer hunting on public lands of the Shiawassee Flats in Saginaw County is by permit only. The deadline for pre-registered hunts on the Shiawassee River State Game Area (SGA) and the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge was in early September and early August, respectively. For additional information about deer hunting on the Shiawassee River SGA, call the St. Charles Field Office at 989- 865-6211, and for information about deer hunting on the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge call the Refuge Headquarters at 989-777-5930.

The Quality Deer Management experimental area (DMU 118) will continue for the fifth year. Hunters are restricted to taking only bucks with three or more points on at least one antler.

Mast crops are very limited in the northern portion of the unit. Late summer/early fall drought conditions may concentrate deer in late standing agricultural crops. Pre-season scouting to locate wild food sources can pay off for those who spend the time. Hunters can expect a good deer season.

SOUTHEAST MANAGEMENT UNIT

(Genesee, Lapeer, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair, and Wayne counties)

Contact: Tim Payne, 734-953-0241

Hunters are reminded that many of the more urban southeastern communities have various forms of firearm closures. However, good archery hunting opportunities still exist in many areas. Hunters should contact their local units of governments for questions dealing with these closures. Hunters should be especially careful in hunting these more urban areas and be thinking safety at all times. Respecting the property rights of others is the best way to ensure future hunting privileges for you and others. Do not hunt on lands of another without their permission. Hunting is still the most efficient method for controlling deer numbers and is an essential method for managing the Management Unit's population.

Hunters need to scout potential hunting areas early as it is often difficult to gain access to private lands once the season starts. There are some private lands open to hunting under the Hunting Access on Private Lands (HAP) program. Hunters are encouraged to check the HAP Guide for these locations.

Oakland, Genesee, and Lapeer counties - Julie Oakes: 248-328-8113

The Oakland County deer population is stable, with the highest deer numbers seen in northeast Oakland County. Hunters who have access to private land should find good deer hunting. Expect high hunting pressure on public land during the first two days of firearms season.

The Genesee County overall deer population is good. There are no state lands in Genesee County, so all deer hunting efforts will take place on private lands. Deer in Genesee County have good antler development due to amount of farming still taking place in this county.

The deer population in Lapeer County is good and still at levels higher than desired. The Lapeer SGA is over 8,000 acres and supports a stable deer herd. This game area should offer good hunting opportunity, but note that deer numbers are still higher on private lands.

Monroe and Wayne counties - Joe Robison: 734-379-9692

The deer population in Monroe County has been on a slight downward trend over the past 2-3 years. Populations for this county are close to goal. There are still a few localized areas within Monroe County that have higher populations. Weather conditions and timing of crop harvests will certainly have an impact on hunting success. Our goal is to maintain a quality herd that is in balance with its habitat to yield healthy fawns, does, and bucks.

St. Clair and Macomb counties - Ernie Kafcas: 586-465-4771

Overall, deer appear to be in good condition for the 2003 season. Population levels in southern Macomb and St. Clair counties are similar to last year. Northern Macomb County continues to have slightly higher numbers of deer. In northern St. Clair County, deer numbers are similar to last year with good numbers of bucks available.

SOUTH CENTRAL MANAGEMENT UNIT

(Clinton, Eaton, Gratiot, Hillsdale, Ingham, Ionia, Jackson, Lenawee, Livingston, Montcalm, Shiawassee and Washtenaw counties)

Contact: David Dominic, 517-641-4903

The South Central Management Unit should again lead the state in total deer harvest even though we expect a smaller deer herd going into the fall deer seasons. The expected buck and antierless harvest should be slightly less than the 2002 season harvest. The counties with the highest deer populations are Jackson, Montcalm, Ionia, and Washtenaw. All 12 of the Management Unit's counties are above their population goal. We have an adequate quota for private land antierless deer licenses in hopes of lowering the deer populations in problem areas. We are still trying to lower our deer population throughout most of the Management Unit, and private land access is the key to any success we have. Hunters need to start early scouting and acquiring access to these lands.

Some areas have received adequate rainfall to allow corn crops to be in good to excellent condition for this time of the year, while others have stagnated with too little rain. Corn maturity is ahead of last year. If fields stay dry, a significant portion of the corn will likely be harvested by November 15, similar to the corn harvest of 2002. An early corn harvest should increase the deer harvest because of the reduced escape cover and increase in vulnerability.

Hunters are encouraged to use antlerless licenses to harvest deer in all seasons, including the late antlerless season on private land, which will be open in four of our twelve counties (Ionia, Jackson, Lenawee, and Hillsdale). Natural deer foods, including acorns and apples, appear to be well above average throughout the Management Unit this year.

Hunters are encouraged to have their deer checked at one of the many deer check stations throughout the state. A Michigan Deer Cooperator patch will be given to hunters that participate. We are especially interested in information on antlerless deer.

Individual county information follows:

Washtenaw County: This year's population is substantially over goal. Harvest for both antlered and antlerless deer is expected to be similar to the harvest of 2002.

Lenawee County: This year's population is substantially over goal. The 2002 buck harvest was one of the highest in many years, thus the harvest of antlered deer this year is expected to be slightly reduced from last year while the antlerless harvest is expected to be up slightly up from the 2002 harvest.

Jackson County: This year's population is slightly over goal. The high buck and antlerless harvest in 2002 is expected to be slightly reduced this year.

Hillsdale County: This year's population is substantially over goal. Harvest of antlered and antlerless deer is expected to be similar to 2002.

Montcalm County: This year's population is well over goal and on the rise. The 2003 harvest of both antlered and antlerless deer is expected to increase slightly from 2002. There will be no late antlerless season in Montcalm County, so hunters are encouraged to fill their antlerless tags early.

Ionia County: This year's population is, once again, well over goal. Harvest for antlered and antlerless deer is expected to be similar to the 2002 harvest.

Eaton County: This year's population is slightly over goal. The harvest of both antlered and antlerless deer is expected to be similar to 2002.

Gratiot, Clinton, Shiawassee, Ingham, and Livingston counties: The five-county area will enter the fall deer season with a herd population that is slightly lower than in 2002. Liberal antlerless regulations in recent years have brought the herd closer to goal. The buck and antlerless harvest is expected to be slightly below the harvest of 2002.

SOUTHWEST MANAGEMENT UNIT

(Allegan, Barry, Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, Kent, Muskegon, Ottawa, St. Joseph and Van Buren counties)

Contact: Sara Schaefer, 269-685-6851

Deer populations have generally stabilized in southwestern Michigan. However, localized areas may have slightly more or slightly fewer deer than last year. These localized changes may be sufficiently large enough that hunters may notice the changes. Deer numbers continue to be very high in Barry, Calhoun, and Kent counties. Portions of Cass, Branch, and Kalamazoo counties also have higher than desired deer populations. Deer are also becoming increasingly numerous in semi-urban and residential areas throughout southwest Michigan.

The corn harvest dates should be normal this year. Hard mast is very spotty with some areas having almost no acorns. Most fruits and berries were very plentiful, and apple trees in the area have had an excellent crop.

Antlerless licenses are once again under a quota allocation in all southwest DMUs. However, hunters may purchase one private land antlerless license per day until the quota for that area is reached. All southwest DMUs have excess private land licenses. Hunters are urged to review the DMU numbering system to assure that they are obtaining licenses for the proper area. Hunters should note that the late antlerless December season is not open in Muskegon, Ottawa, Allegan, Van Buren, Berrien, and Cass counties.

Hunters are urged to take advantage of the opportunity to assist in the proper management of the deer herd. The deer harvest in 2002 was up slightly from the 2001 harvest due to the cooler temperatures and excellent weather for hunting during the 2002 firearm season. Keep in mind that harvest was down in 2001 because of weather issues. As the herd continues to decrease as desired, the number of antlered bucks will also naturally be fewer, and the buck harvest will decrease. However, average body size of all deer and the average antler size of bucks should increase. Thus, hunters should expect to see fewer deer, but a slightly higher percentage of larger antlered bucks with bigger racks. This trend should continue as hunters, landowners, and the state cooperate in deer management. To achieve these improvements in the population, hunters need to continue an aggressive harvest of adult antlerless deer. It appears there was an excellent fawn crop in 2003, and hunters should take extra care to avoid harvesting button bucks, while maintaining the harvest of adult does. Landowners in areas of high deer populations appear to be willing to allow responsible hunters on their property. It is important to remember that access opportunities are most available to hunters who project a sportsmanship image and contact the landowner well before the season.